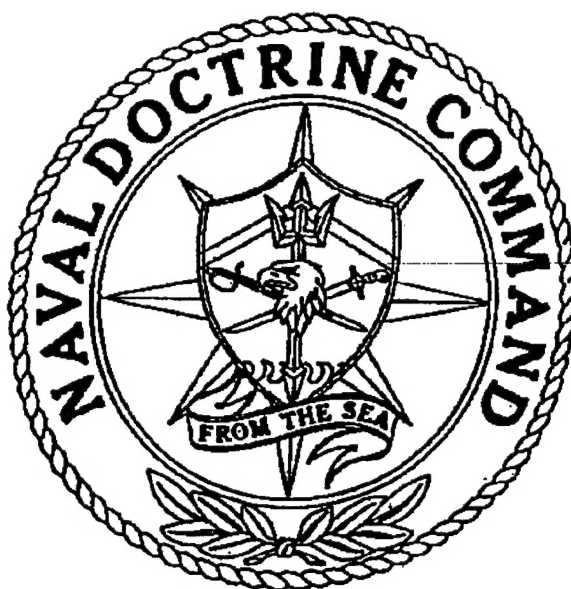


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Let's Put "War" Back Into Warfighting

by  
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June 1994

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## **LET'S PUT "WAR" BACK INTO WARFIGHTING**

by  
James J. Tritten<sup>1</sup>

The subject matter of the recently published *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces* (Joint Pub 1)<sup>1</sup> is war. Its pages are steeped with historical examples of wars fought by this nation and the bravery of its citizens called upon to do their nation's bidding in foreign lands against many foes. Its principles guide the conduct of joint campaigns fought by the armed services in the context of general war -- "armed conflict between major powers in which the total resources of the belligerents are employed and the national survival of a major belligerent is in jeopardy."<sup>2</sup>

In the days of the cold war, we planned, programmed force structure, and trained for general war and generally considered limited war -- "armed conflict short of general war involving the overt engagement of the military forces of two or more nations"<sup>3</sup> -- as a lesser included case. We also did some, albeit qualified, specific preparation (planning, programming, and training) for limited warfare. Today, we have been told to plan, program force structure, and train for limited war and essentially to remove general war from the focus of any attention. This essay will recount how we got into this sorry state of affairs and recommend some extremely low cost alternatives which will keep the "war" in joint warfighting.

### **Defining the Threat out of Existence**

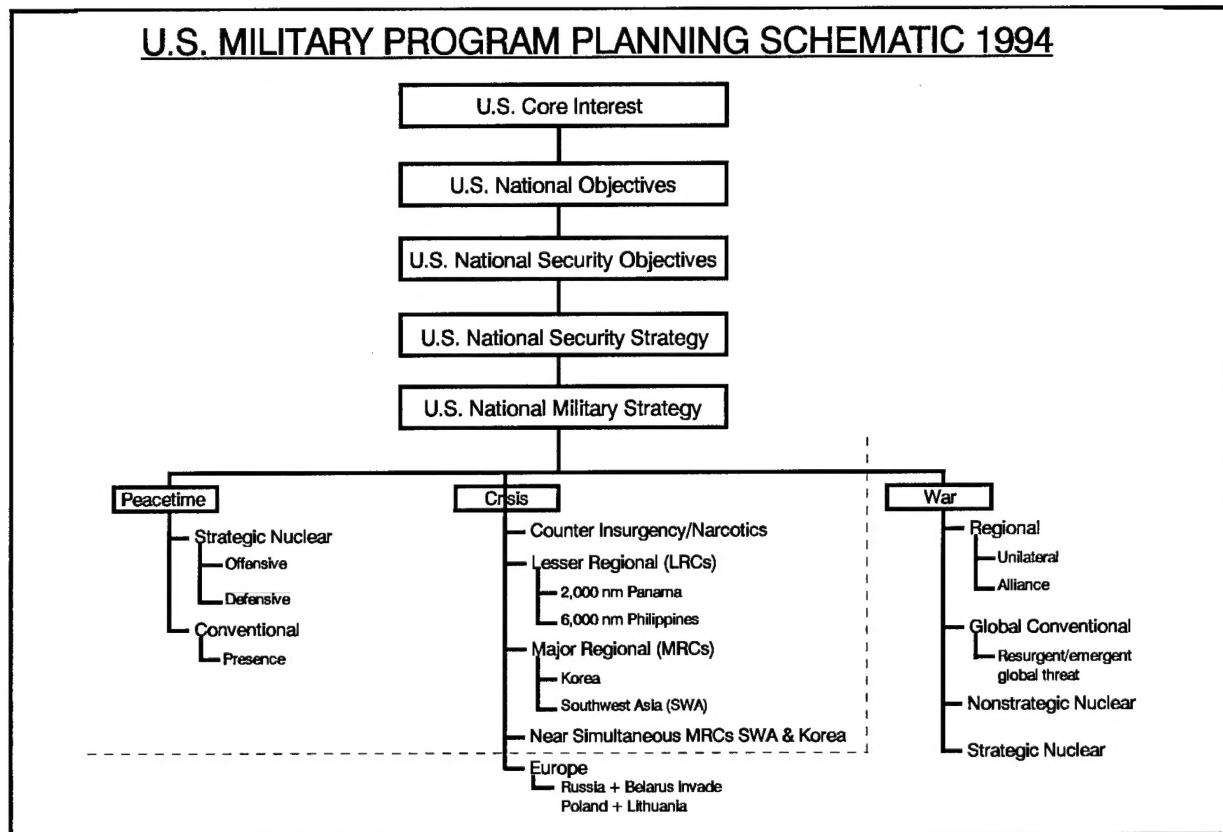
While most of the military was involved in the planning for and conduct of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, there was a small group of officers within the Washington bureaucracy that pressed on with a plan to totally redirect the efforts of the Department of Defense away from the crumbling Soviet empire and focus it instead on regional crises and peacetime presence. The shift would formally codify that there was a spectrum of warfare and that one need to prepare for more than just one type.

In doing this, the planners used a taxonomy of warfare first outlined in the 1990 and improved in the 1991 versions of the *Joint Military Net Assessment*.<sup>4</sup> This paradigm charts the spectrum of warfare from the one extreme of peacetime presence to the other of strategic nuclear warfare. That model for warfare, updated through 1994, can be graphically depicted as follows in Figure (1):

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed by the author are his alone and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Navy.

FIGURE 1



Although the categorization of the various types of warfare was a welcome addition to the planning process, programming was to have major, and perhaps unintended, consequences. The category of "war," regional, global conventional, and nuclear, was bound up with the crumbling Soviet threat and placed into a programming category of "reconstitution." Reconstitution was the program which would handle any future resurgent/emergent global threat (REGT). It would involve expanded recruitment, weapons modernization and greatly increased production, and if necessary, the draft.<sup>5</sup>

Former President George Bush's administration was quite explicit in their plan for reconstitution being necessary for the U.S. to respond to any future "war."<sup>6</sup> Programmed active and reserve forces would only be maintained to handle nuclear deterrence, crises (even two near-simultaneous), and peacetime presence. "War" would be beyond the capability of our programmed active and reserve forces but would be handled, if necessary, once we had reconstituted or rebuilt our deterrent or warfighting capability. Reconstitution was not the same thing as mobilization. In the former, new defense manufacturing capabilities and

military forces would be built essentially from the ground up. In the latter, the existing industrial base is asked to do more and already formed reserve forces are brought on active duty, trained, and asked to perform their missions.<sup>7</sup>

The Bush administration left Bill Clinton with an in-place set of plans for national security: the *National Military Strategy of the United States*, that dates from early 1992,<sup>8</sup> a January 1993 version of the *National Security Strategy of the United States*,<sup>9</sup> and a Secretary of Defense *Report to the President and the Congress* that appeared just days before they left office.<sup>10</sup> The 1992 election of Bill Clinton resulted in an implicit embracing of the Bush regionally-focused national security and national military strategies, naturally with new words and a title for the strategy -- "From Containment to Enlargement."<sup>11</sup>

As we know, former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's view of the upper need for joint combat capability of the active and reserve components of the U.S. armed forces was the ability to handle Desert Storm-sized major regional contingencies (MRCs).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in his portrayal of the threat while he was still a congressman, Aspin portrayed possible threat nations in relationship to Iraq (pre-Desert Storm). Aspin's building blocks for American armed forces necessary for crisis response were Desert Storm and Panama equivalents. Congressman Aspin viewed his "Option C" as capable of handling two MRCs and a smaller lesser regional contingency (LRC). With his appointment as Secretary of Defense, Aspin testified to Congress and signed out the *Report of the Bottom-Up Review* and the *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, that were remarkably consistent with his previous views as a Congressman.<sup>13</sup>

With the arrival of the present American government, we have seen a virtual end of the programming for reconstitution. This term and concept is absent from Clinton administration defense policy documents. Instead, the administration plans to deal with an REGT with its strategy of enlargement by ensuring that Russia remains committed to its movement towards democracy and a market economy. Reconstitution is tainted as a Bush-administration word and accompanied by the baggage of being associated with dollars which might otherwise be spent on maintaining the combat capability of forces in hand.

The unintended consequence of this programming decision to eliminate planning for reconstitution is that war, "general war," is no longer being planned for by the Washington headquarters bureaucracy. The upper end of our planning is two near-simultaneous MRCs -- which by the Pentagon's own definitions is "limited war." Even the major European crisis, which exceeded the requirements of two near-simultaneous MRCs appears to have been pushed aside. Hence, program planning does not appear to include anything to the right or below the dashed line that

appears in Figure (1) above.

### **Do We Need to be Able to Fight a "General War"?**

The smart money says that the Soviet threat having gone away, there is no longer a need to have active and reserve forces capable of fighting a global conventional, or "general war." Indeed, Admiral David Jeremiah, then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced on the pages of the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* that we could count on 8-10 years warning of an REGT.<sup>14</sup> Without disputing that point yet, is there a need to maintain at least a **plan** for reconstitution (or the same thing with a new name) to deal with an REGT and therefore to consciously address **general war**?

If we answer "no," then we are telling our military that it need **not** consider "war" in its war planning nor in the development of its warfighting doctrine! If we answer "yes," then the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and their Chairman (CJCS) might directly confront the current American government who appears to not want to hear about reconstitution and its concurrent need for resources.

An MRC is by definition only a "limited war" and not what most military officers would consider "war." Specifically, a "general war" is fought from a different perspective than a "limited war." It involves the total resources of the belligerents involved and national survival is at stake. No matter how much "warfighting" took place during Operation Desert Storm, or in Vietnam, or Korea, these were not wars that involved the total resources of the United States nor was our national survival at stake. They were "limited wars."

"General war" would probably require the sequential and simultaneous management of joint campaigns on a global scale. During the era of the "cold war," we assumed that "general war" would be fought under conditions of the threat of use and the actual possible use of nuclear weapons. "Limited wars" could probably be planned to be fought within one major region and without nuclear weapons.

Even if we accept the difference between "general war" and "limited war," there is the obvious need to consider that the efforts of governments throughout the West will be successful and "general war" will be deterred. This is essentially the planning assumption made during the period between World Wars I & II. The fact that World War II occurred is to acknowledge that despite our best efforts, a nation may emerge with the capability to challenge the U.S. at the "general war" level.

The question then arises: how long would it take the Russians, or a some other nation, to regain a position that would

cause the U.S. to be concerned with a peer or near peer military force? The answer to this question involves the issue of strategic warning -- "a warning prior to the initiation of a threatening act"<sup>15</sup> -- or otherwise expressed, the long-term warning which would permit a response by governments.

There is a difference between strategic warning and response time; warning signs might not be recognized, or warning might be provided and ignored. Even accepting the ability of the intelligence community to provide strategic warning, there is controversy over what governments will do when faced with the initially, perhaps inconclusive, evidence provided. Warning time should be viewed in the context of the warning of general war provided to, and the response made by, the U.S. from September 1939 to December 1941.

If more recent history is the preferred guide, consider the non-reactions to rearmament by totalitarian nations and violations of cold war-era arms control agreements. Based upon that legacy, we should assume that democracies will: (1), delay decisions to react for many reasons -- such as different interpretations of ambiguous intelligence data, the desire to de-escalate a crisis, etc., (2), deny that a change in another nation's behavior has taken place or, if it has, is strategically insignificant or not precisely a violation of an agreement, and (3), even suppress the intelligence and findings of facts that do not support government policy.

Unlike defense programming planners, joint military war planners are not required to use "best-case" assumptions and are, therefore, authorized to formulate their plans on less optimistic suppositions. Hence, the current redirection of programming planners to the "best-case" (eight to ten years warning) does not necessarily determine war planning for current forces.

In other words, despite the programming done by Washington headquarters which has deleted reconstitution, hence a consideration of "general war," there is no reason that the U.S. armed forces collectively or individually or our warfighting Commanders-in-Chief (CinCs) cannot consider the full spectrum of war in their efforts to complete their statutory roles and missions.

## **Recommendations**

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chairman need to decide whether they intend to confront the current government and publicly embrace "general war" as a concern for the U.S. armed forces or whether they might try doing so "under the table." Virtually nothing stays "under the table," but it might be worth a try. The other major choice is to tell the U.S. armed forces that they should ignore "general war." If they do nothing, then

the armed forces will drift into further non-consideration of "general war" in their joint and service-specific warfighting doctrine as they place primary emphasis on "limited war."<sup>16</sup> If we admit that "general war" is theoretically possible, doctrine for such war will be required and developed before we lose to downsizing the in-service expertise of planners with decades of experience.

There really would not be a great deal required from the services and the various joint warfighting structures to say that they were still planning to handle "general war." For example, now that we have changed our Unified Command Plan (UCP) to reflect the needs of the new international security environment, we might have plans to reconstitute our previous wartime CinCs that would be used to fight in a "global war" environment. This would obviously include a return to the general policy of having a Navy officer as commander of a reconstituted USCINCLANT.

Planning for reconstitution of forces for "general war" might include: mothballing combat usable warships and aircraft now scheduled for scrapping; the return to service of warships and aircraft in long-term storage; the rebuilding of an operational-level amphibious capability; rebuilding sealift and inter-theater airlift; recreating strategic air and missile defenses; the re-deployment of short-range and naval nuclear weapons; conversion of non-nuclear capable bombers into intercontinental strategic nuclear delivery vehicles; and turning the attentions of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to civil defense. None of these plans need be matched with programs -- reconstitution would be a minimally funded plan with a modest staff, and perhaps some "smoke and mirrors."

The U.S. military should include in their family of actual war plans, plans based upon the track record of their government acting courageously in response to provocation. For example, the military has never been barred from drafting internal war plans which assume that authorization for the mobility of existing forces and the mobilization of reserves will not be granted until hostilities begin. We are not required to ignore "general war" and the need to meet an REGT just because it is not currently fashionable in Washington programming jargon.

All that is needed for a reconstitution plan is to be able to convince an REGT and allied or coalition nations, that we can rebuild a credible deterrence/defense faster than any potential opponent can generate an overwhelming offense. The U.S. need not reconstitute the 1990-era conventional force it had -- this is "old thinking." We need only be able to convince other nations that we have a capability to either deter an REGT or provide a defense against their offense. This military-oriented plan can work hand-in-glove with such present governmental strategies as enlargement of democracies and market economies as a means to



avoid "general wars" in the future.

Reconstitution and planning for "general war" must take place in more than the service and joint environment. We have never had the plan nor the capability to fight at the strategic-level of warfare, or a "general war," without the participation of allies. At a minimum, NATO will have to address "general war" and "reconstitution" as well with at least a plan. Currently, NATO nations have skewed the original American concept of reconstitution to what we term "mobilization."<sup>17</sup> If NATO is not willing to face the difference and at least plan for "general war" under conditions of reconstitution, then there is no reason for the U.S. government to devote one iota of effort in this category. After all, if NATO does not reconstitute its ability to participate in a "general war," then why would we even consider sending troops on our own to that theater for anything more complicated than an MRC?

NATO exercises and simulated military decision-making usually have assumed that the alliance political structure would make decisions, which would then be executed by near-simultaneous actions taken by all member nations. In our new more political alliance environment, alliance and national military commanders might have to devise future plans based upon decision-making which has member nations taking unilateral actions prior to those of NATO as a whole. National decisions taking preeminence, in turn, would require planning for sequential rather than simultaneous alliance military operations. With forces initially remaining under national command, U.S. forces would operate under joint military doctrine instead of alliance combined doctrine.

The reconstitution of industrial capability appears the single most demanding element of the new national security strategy. The March 1991 *Joint Military Net Assessment* states that "it would likely be 6 to 24 months before industrial base mobilization or surge production could begin to deliver critical items...by the end-FY [fiscal year] 1997, it is estimated that it would take 2 to 4 years to restore production capability to 1990 levels for items whose lines have gone 'cold'." If this assessment was even nearly correct, it is distinctly possible that you simply cannot reconstitute a 1990's-era conventional warfighting capability once you dismantle the industrial base. Assuming that could be true, it does not preclude the need to still be able to handle "general war." Perhaps reconstitution is not the answer to how to handle an REGT and fight a "general war."

Nuclear weapons, especially those based at sea, and maritime forces, offer the U.S. an ability to fully meet its military commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty without reconstituting extensive ground and air forces deployed on European soil. Even if the NATO nations were to continue with their own disre-



gard of "general war" and reconstitution, these weapons and forces are a means to satisfy the national security requirements of the United States operating as a unitary actor.

Simply put, if the U.S. Army and Air Force were to totally withdraw all of its combat capability from the European continent, the U.S. would still provide routine extended deterrence to NATO against an REGT with its strategic nuclear forces at sea. A rapid response to any European MRC could be met with our forward-deployed carriers and Marines as well as new Air Force composite wings and rapidly deployable Army units. Nuclear weapons would be the low-cost hedge.

### **Conclusion**

The shift in focus away from "general war" to "limited war" is welcome but has gone to such extremes that there is virtually no consideration of "general war" still on-going in the U.S. armed forces. If we never have to fight another "general war" again, then it does not matter. If, on the other hand, one assumes that there is even a slight chance that "general war" is possible, then the armed forces must address the issue. If we do not at least plan for "war," who will? We should not drift into an answer to these serious questions, but consciously address them.

### **Notes**

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces* (Joint Pub 1), Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, November 11, 1991.
2. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 23, 1994, p. 163.
3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 23, 1994, p. 223.
4. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *1990 Joint Military Net Assessment*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, undated (circa March 1990), pp. V-1 & V-2; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *1991 Joint Military Net Assessment*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1991, pp. 1-5 & 9-2.
5. Barton Gellman, "Pentagon War Scenarios Spotlights Russia," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1992, p. 1, citing a February 4, 1992 "1994-1999 Defense Planning Guidance [DPG] Scenario Set for Final Coordination."

6. George Bush, "Remarks by the President to the Aspen Institute Symposium" (as delivered), Office of the Press Secretary (Aspen, CO), The White House, August 2, 1990.
7. For an interesting historical example of the differences, see: Thomas Hone, "Naval Reconstitution, Surge, and Mobilization: Once and Future, *Naval War College Review*, 47, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 67-85.
8. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1992.
9. The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993.
10. Dick Cheney, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993.
11. Remarks of Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, "From Containment to Enlargement," at the Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, September 21, 1993, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, undated.
12. Representative Les Aspin, Chairman, House Armed Services Committee, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrative Options," February 25, 1992; and "Defense 1997 Alternatives: A Briefing by Rep. Les Aspin, Chairman, House Armed Services Committee," February 25, 1992.
13. Les Aspin, "Statement of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin Before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Connection with the Clinton Defense Plan," April 1, 1993; Les Aspin, Secretary of Defense, *Report of the Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1993; and Les Aspin, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1994.
14. Admiral David E. Jeremiah, USN, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Beyond the Cold War," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 118 (May 1992): 55.
15. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 23, 1994, p. 372.

16. The recently issued Joint Staff *Universal Joint Task List* attempted to at least list reconstitution as a capability of the armed forces. Unfortunately, the authors did not fully understand the concept, as originally articulated during the Bush administration. They placed it with theater-strategic-level "reconstitution" of combat-attrited forces (an Army term). See The Joint Staff, "ST.8.4.2 Reconstitute Forces," *Universal Joint Task List*, MCM-147-93, 25 October 1993, p. 2-44.

17. Jan S. Breemer, "U.S. Forces in Europe: The Search for a Mission," in *Reconstituting National Defense: The New U.S. National Security Strategy*, James J. Tritten and Paul N. Stockton, Eds. (New York, NY: Praeger, 1992), p. 148. On the other hand, the French military makes allowance for a non-programmatic scenario involving a reemergent threat--see Admiral Jacques Lanxada, FRN, Chief of the French Defense Staff, "French Defence Policy After the White Paper," *The RUSI [Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies] Journal*, 139, no. 2 (April 1994): 19-20.